

National Audit Office value for money study - Supporting people with autism through adulthood

1. There are around half a million people with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in England. This study will consider the extent to which existing services meet the needs of adults with an ASD condition, focusing particularly on the transition from adolescence and the subsequent provision of health, social care, education and employment support to adults.
2. The study will thus not focus on children's services but rather it will look at the extent to which school and health provision for children develops into equivalent services for adults. Complementing work commissioned by organisations such as the National Autistic Society, Research Autism and the Shirley Foundation, as well as the review by John Bercow MP of services for young people with speech, language and communication needs, the study will assess the current provision of services to adults across the whole autistic spectrum; whether providing ongoing care and support to individuals with severe autism or, where appropriate, supporting people into work and/or further education.
3. The study will also explore the longer-term health and economic impacts of failing to cater for adults on the autistic spectrum - for example, comparing the downstream costs of mental health crises against more appropriate and timely interventions such as mentoring schemes or supported housing.

Issues

4. The study will examine the extent to which government departments responsible for care services, employment and benefits are working together and in conjunction with Local Authorities and NHS organisations to provide appropriate interventions for adults with an ASD condition. For example, where organisations operate with separate budgets, there may be a risk that they are tempted to see only the immediate cost avoided by not providing services, rather than recognising the greater downstream impact on NHS-funded mental health services.
5. Many adults with autism depend on support from their parents and other family members. The study will therefore include examining how well services are configured to provide ongoing support not just to adults with an ASD condition, but also their carers.
6. There may well be a significant number of people with a high-functioning ASD condition or with Asperger's Syndrome currently living undiagnosed and disenfranchised in the community. Even when diagnosed, high-functioning adults are frequently not eligible for

Learning Disability services because their IQ is too high (>70), yet they do not fall within the remit of adult mental health services either – unless their difficulties trigger an acute crisis such as psychosis. The study will investigate the extent to which appropriate multi-disciplinary health and social care teams are in place to treat this group.

7. Many people with ASD could potentially obtain and keep jobs if given appropriate support, thus contributing to the economy and assisting their social development. The study will assess whether government services aimed at getting people into work are sufficiently tailored to the needs of people with ASD.

Possible Methods

- Modelling of costs, benefits, and affordability of different local service configurations and interventions within the existing policy framework.
- Research into what is known about ASD prevalence in localities.
- NAO analysis of service provision data, plus NHS / local authority (LA) expenditure / service mapping by region.
- NAO analysis of qualitative data from focus groups of people with autism and carers.
- Web-forum and/or survey for people with autism to provide their views and experiences.
- Analysis of benefits uptake by people with an ASD condition.
- In-depth Health and Social Care systems case study– with a potential added-impact product along the lines of guidance/workshops for commissioners of ASD services.
- Surveys of LAs / NHS organisations (including questions about local care and employment schemes).
- Analysis of employment schemes/ rates of success
- Workshop with commissioners, possibly building on existing service models
- Case studies of organisations who have successfully employed people with an ASD condition.

Impact

8. This study should highlight how the delivery of services for people with an ASD condition could be improved, including the identification of ways to address the risk of individuals, particularly in adulthood, ‘falling through the cracks’ between current areas of service provision.